

## Future of the ROK-US Nuclear Cooperation Agreement

**Session:** Regency Room

**Date/Time:** February 20, 2013 / 09:00-10:15

**Moderator:** Park Jiyoung, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

**Speakers:** Mark Hibbs, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace  
Sheen Seongho, Seoul National University  
Scott Snyder, Council on Foreign Relations  
Sharon Squassoni, Center for Strategic and International Studies  
Yim Man-Sung, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology

**Rapporteur:** David Santoro, Pacific Forum CSIS

### *Session Sketch*

Mark Hibbs, senior associate in the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, opened the session by stressing that the most difficult issue regarding the future of the ROK-US Nuclear Cooperation Agreement is linked to the ROK's willingness to get involved in commercial uranium enrichment and to introduce pyroprocessing in its activities. This is of concern to the United States, which has worked since the early 2000s to limit the spread of enrichment and reprocessing (ENR) technologies throughout the world. Mr. Hibbs explained that because time is running out for negotiations to proceed (and given the current regional security context characterized by North Korea's recent provocations), the most likely (and most desirable) outcome would be for the ROK and the United States to extend the existing agreement for a few years and review its terms later on the basis of the conclusions of the joint study on pyroprocessing currently being conducted. Looking to the future, Mr. Hibbs suggested that it will be difficult for the United States to resist the ROK's willingness to develop ENR technologies because there are good justifications and, more importantly, because the ROK has good nonproliferation credentials.

Sheen Seongho, associate professor at the Graduate School of International Studies at Seoul National University, followed by stressing that he was in agreement with his analysis and

---

\* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

\*The views expressed herein are panel overviews of the Asan Nuclear Forum. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the author or the institutions they are affiliated with.

recommendations. He highlighted that the issue should not be a test of the ROK-US alliance, acknowledging that it had however already become politicized and portrayed as a "trust" problem, despite very good relations between the two countries. Dr. Sheen insisted that it was important to remember that the ROK-US Nuclear Cooperation Agreement is exclusively for peaceful purposes and that it should not be seen as an attempt by the ROK to develop a nuclear weapon capability. Significantly, he suggested that the United States should show more "respect" for the ROK's program and intentions, just as the ROK needs to show "responsibility". He noted that the ROK's strong support for the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty regime and the Nuclear Security Summit process is evidence that it is acting as a responsible actor.

Scott Snyder, senior fellow for Korea Studies and the director of the Program on U.S.-Korea Policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, noted that nuclear cooperation between the ROK and the United States has been extremely successful and, as a consequence, that both parties must find common ground. Noting that politicians have portrayed the matter as a "trust" issue, he recommended that it be left to technical experts, who tend to focus more on cooperation. Mr. Snyder agreed that in current circumstances, the ROK and the United States should extend the current agreement. Sharon Squassoni, director of the proliferation prevention program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, also agreed that extension is the best way forward, noting that this would however need to be approved by the US Congress, which is not guaranteed. She also insisted that the position of the United States is not to get the ROK to forswear ENR technologies, despite interest in the US Congress to restrict ENR transfers. Rather, the United States is concerned about applying nonproliferation principles fairly across the states.

Yim Man-Sung, professor in the Department of Nuclear and Quantum Engineering at the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, took a different approach. He stressed that the current ROK administration is favorable to the ROK's nuclear program and that a different administration may not have a similar perspective, which raises concerns about postponing renegotiation of the current agreement. Insisting that the ROK has no intention to

---

\* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

\*The views expressed herein are panel overviews of the Asan Nuclear Forum. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the author or the institutions they are affiliated with.

develop a nuclear weapon capability (and that it would not make sense to do so), Dr. Yim explained that unlike India, which has developed nuclear weapons, and Japan, which has suffered important safety issues, the ROK has very good nonproliferation and safety credentials. He also stressed that renegotiation of the ROK-US Nuclear Cooperation Agreement is important both for technical reasons (to deal with spent fuel) and economic considerations.

---

\* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

\*The views expressed herein are panel overviews of the Asan Nuclear Forum. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the author or the institutions they are affiliated with.